

BBC file

FOREIGN BROADCAST INFORMATION SERVICE

AMERICAN EMBASSY

LONDON, W. 1.

5 Grosvenor Square

24 February 1955

[Redacted]
Chief, FBIS
2430 E Street, N.W.
Washington 25, D. C.

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Subject: Joint Coordination Committee
Meeting

Dear Alan:

Much has happened since you wrote your letter of 20 January requesting comment on BBC services, so that some of what is said below may need to be reconsidered in the near future in the light of coverage and other retrenchments. Unless the reductions, however, should be accompanied by some reorganization it seems likely that FBIS processors will continue to be confronted with the same problems. My comments, therefore, will be on the basis of services as presently rendered and will follow the enumeration of the Memorandum of the Chief, RPB.

1. I think it is generally agreed that the BBC has maintained a high ratio of coverage to output, particularly in the Soviet Home and European services, and that FBIS requirements have in the main been met. Quality of the material produced is admittedly unequal, but that of the most competent and conscientious monitors is indeed of a high order and worthy of FBIS emulation. Praise for the truly admirable reference library is richly deserved, but I think it might be linked with an expression of appreciation of the many monitors who have proved a valuable source of information for analysts doing research in various aspects of radio behavior.

2. It can also be said that for the most important Soviet materials, BBC supplies routinely all text requirements. This service extends as well to the speeches of top Satellite leaders. Performance is less satisfactory, however, for secondary Orbit leaders and Party organ editorials. If Washington will supply the names of these leaders and publications from which texts are desired, an attempt will be made to have them supplied. It is believed that such an effort will prove generally successful if the approach is made with proper consideration for BBC manpower capabilities.

3. Orientation of new monitors would not, I think, prove very effective without prior orientation of the old ones and to do this systematically for a staff of 125 would be a task of forbidding magnitude and doubtful success. By far the larger part of our difficulties lies not in ignorance of our requirements on the part of the monitors, but in the inconsistent and inadequate performance of them. This failure is due to what might be described with all due respect as the basic defect of the BBC system from our point of view--the weakness of the immediate supervision over the monitors. Our requirements may indeed be passed on from H.R.U. to Senior Assistants to team leaders or individual monitors, but no one watches over the product to insure that our needs have been attended to. Even further, the monitors, as you know, are virtual arbiters in choice and procedure and the work is distributed independently and unchecked. Since the BBC News Bureau's needs are limited in scope and differ from ours in many important respects, and since the BBC Editorial processes and publishes a day or more after the broadcasts, it is the FBIS editors who are on the front line and who act as copy screeners for both services. Orientation, if undertaken at all, could be limited to the Senior Assistants, except for the fact that these men apparently do not genuinely supervise the monitors' production. As far as FBIS editors are concerned, their functions are restricted to acting as a channel for our routine requests and queries. This is a delicate subject, of course, and we have done nothing so far to even hint at dissatisfaction, let alone suggest organizational reforms. It seems, however, that until these Senior Assistants or the team leaders are made real supervisors, one of whose responsibilities would be checking monitors' copy for requirements, accuracy and standardization, we shall continue to have to deal almost entirely with individual monitors of variable interest and performance.

4. In view of its importance the Russian team is, in fact, somewhat below standard, although a few monitors have long experience and outstanding ability. Of these, Arnoldi is certainly one, despite his Italian origin. Bilibin and Rubinstein should also be included, even if they are nominally Senior Assistants. Bilibin in particular often works on important statements. These men cannot be considered as unsophisticates or as lacking knowledge of or interest in Soviet affairs. The painful truth is that personnel losses in the last two years have been irretrievable. Recruits are hard to find and those that are hired are not up to the standard of the old hands.

5. Of the remaining teams, it seems generally agreed that the Bulgarian, Rumanian and Arabic are the poorest. It is to be hoped that the impending reduction in coverage and force will leave the BBC with the best in these languages.

Little remains to be said in connection with the remaining points in your letter, since you have had the BBC proposals and have commented on them. Your comments were just what Campbell wanted and are now receiving the closest study. He thinks his hand will be strengthened by your strong stand for East German and Moscow external coverage. The budget cut as published amounts to £25,000 and will involve the separation of 25 from the Reception Unit alone. If East Germany goes and they get no material from us, Part III of the Summaries will be discontinued, with the dropping of about five from Editorial. Incidentally, Kit Saltmarshe has received an appointment as editor of "London Calling" and will leave shortly after Campbell's return from the U. S. His successor is not yet named.

No further trouble is anticipated in connection with REUTER's association with TASS and DPA, although one wonders, as you suggest, whether it may not break out again some day on another front.

Sincerely,



Chief, London Bureau

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